

Restorative Research

Unfortunately, in our research practices we often fail to operate under principles that are consistent with our beliefs in restorative justice and instead mirror the values of the dominant justice system. Like justice professionals, as researchers we view ourselves as objective experts in the field, assuming responsibility for the stories of the people we study. We collect data and stories, interpreting the meaning without consulting or giving benefit to our subjects. This approach to research disempowers and leads to 'othering' (Fine, 1994). To avoid these pitfalls, we are challenged to find ways of knowing and doing that reflect the values we espouse in RJ.

Drawing from these restorative values, as well as the emerging 'new' qualitative research, we suggest the following 'transformative guidelines' as a way of knowing that is appropriate to this work.

1. Transformative inquiry aims at social action more than 'pure' knowledge
2. Transformative inquiry acknowledges that much knowledge is subjective, constructed and inter-relational
3. Transformative inquiry recognizes the complex and limited nature of our findings
4. Transformative inquiry takes seriously the power dynamics inherent in all inquiries
5. Transformative inquiry respects subjects as participants in the study
6. Transformative inquiry defines the researcher's role as facilitator, collaborator and learner, rather than neutral expert
7. Transformative inquiry values process as much as product
8. Transformative inquiry acknowledges others' realities and the researcher is open to being affected personally by this interaction
9. Transformative inquiry is attuned to the potential harms and unintended consequences for subjects and others
10. Transformative inquiry aims at an appropriate balance of subjectivity and objectivity, avoiding co-optation by funders, clients, colleagues or subjects

Barb Toews & Howard Zehr, (2003). Ways of knowing for a restorative worldview. In *Restorative Justice in Context: International Practice and Directions* Eds. E.G.M. Weitekamp & H-J. Kerner. Willan Publishing: Cullompton, Devon. pp 257-271

Appreciative Inquiry

See <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/AEN01/AEN01.pdf> for a fuller presentation of Appreciative Inquiry and its use in education research. That document uses the 4-D model (Discover – Dream – Design – Deliver), whereas I prefer the 4-I model (inquire – Imagine – Innovate – Implement).

In brief, the process is as follows:

Inquire

Interview each other using the Appreciative Inquiry questions:

- Tell me about a time when you felt most connected, most engaged with your work. What was happening? Who was involved?
- What is most important to you about the work that you do?
- If you could transform the way you do your work, what would it look like and what would it take to make it happen?

Imagine

In groups, think about an organisation you work in or with. Imagine that two years from now this organisation wins an international award for their restorative work. What would be happening for the organisation to have achieved this award? Depict what would we see, hear, feel, notice?

Innovate

In groups, devise 3 *provocative propositions* from what you have imagined for your organisation. A provocative proposition is an affirmative sentence in the present tense linking what is with what could be e.g. 'Staff are able *and* willing to engage in a restorative process to resolve workplace conflicts'.

Implement

Use the provocative propositions to make an implementation plan.

If you have any questions or comments about restorative research and evaluation, then please do not hesitate to contact me:

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